

Early Washougal love story features Indian princess



RICHARD OUGH

The story of love at first sight between an Indian princess and a burly English seaman and their life together in early day Washougal can now be told in detail for the first time.

The princess, daughter of an Indian chief of the Cascades tribe, was given the name of White Wing because her skin was lighter than other Indians of the tribe that lived near the present Bridge of the Gods. Her husband, however, preferred to call her Betsy. His name was Richard Howe and he sailed on Hudson's Bay merchant ships between London and Fort Vancouver, via the Hawaiian Islands, in the days of Dr. John McLoughlin.

Their story has been pieced together from memories of a granddaughter, Mrs. Gracia (Reggie) Jones of Washougal, from old newspaper clippings and other sources.

Although the Englishman's name was Howe, he pronounced it 'Owe' and the early American settlers and public officials wrote it down as "Ough." Since he could not read or write, he didn't know the error had been made, and the family name has continued to be Ough through six generations.

The story of the chance meeting of Richard and Betsy in about 1838 was

me, and when I look back again he still looking at me."

A month went by and the princess kept thinking about the big Englishman. Then one day he appeared in a canoe, alone, as the Indians were fishing.

"My father look at him and say, 'Ugh! that man brave warrior. Come here all by himself. Maybe some Indian cut 'em hair! Then my father say, what you want? You come here all alone. Maybe so Indian kill you?' Richard stand up and say he no afraid any man; he can't think 'bout anybody but White Wing. He think he can see White Wing in the clouds, White Wing in the forest, White Wing in his dreams. He say, 'come, my pretty bird, and fly with me. I am lonely and my nest is empty.' Oh, he talk so nice!"

To make a long story short, Ough offered to give the chief many blankets, beads, knives, a looking glass and a hatchet for his daughter's hand.

But, according to the fading newspaper clipping, the chief was unimpressed. He said if the two married, he'd never see his daughter again. The two men talked and talked. Richard went away, came back again eight different times before the old chief was convinced of his sincerity. Finally, he agreed if Ough would build a house for White Wing on the river.

Richard agreed to build a house the next day, and set the wedding day for the day after that.

And so on the third day, a fleet of 100 canoes of Indians in full regalia and the chief and his daughter arrived at the Fort Vancouver waterfront.

Richard was waiting with Dr. McLoughlin and other Hudson's Bay officials. The chief asked about the house. Richard pointed to a little house with the door standing open, and the chief gave the signal for the wedding to begin.

White-haired Dr. McLoughlin conducted the service in his capacity as a civil magistrate of the British crown. According to the old interview, he noted that as long as Richard and Betsy lived together in the little house the Indian and the white man would not fight, but would fish and trade with each other.

A feast of broiled salmon and venison was prepared by the visiting Indians, and Dr. McLoughlin gave the bride a silk shawl and Chief Trader Douglas gave her a



BETSY OUGH

necklace.

But Betsy was worried. As a princess, she and her parents had slaves and she did not know how to cook or do other household chores. So when her new husband went back to sea, Mrs. McLoughlin, herself an Indian, sent her to the kitchen to learn from the chief factor's servants the necessary household arts. Gracia recalls her grandmother criticizing her for her grubby hands after working in the garden. Gracia's mother would then remind the old lady that she had been a princess and always had soft hands because she did not do women's work as a girl.

Some time later, Dr. McLoughlin told the couple that the heaver were being depleted and other game was rapidly disappearing. He advised them to get some land and become farmers. Richard asked Betsy where she would like to live. She said near the Washougal River. This was the home of her mother, Running Fawn, and this was where the Cascade Indians had spent most of their winters to escape the severe cold.

So Richard built a log house near the Columbia River, just west of the present town of Washougal, and here they lived until he died in 1884. In 1849, he applied for a donation land claim, which was granted after the Civil War.

Richard and Betsy had 10 children. The eldest was Sarah, born in about 1839. Next in order were Grace, Richard, Benjamin, Elizabeth, Mary, Frederick, Cecilia, Emily, and Gracia's father, John Thomas, who was the youngest, born in 1863.

When John grew up he married Hattie Durgan of Battle Ground and built a home north of his parents' log house, where Gracia and her brother, Richard were born. When Grandfather Richard died, Betsy went to live with John's family. The house was on present-day Eighth Street, between the railroad and C Street.

When Joe Durgan decided to move his store business and post office from the first Washougal at Parker's Landing to the present townsite, he bought 20 acres of the Ough property and platted the new town. This was about 1880.

Gracia said her father was a very large man, about six-feet-four, and always rode a big horse. He became a river captain.

When Gracia was six she went to school — for one day. She complained that the seats were too hard and stubbornly refused to go back. About this time, the family moved to Yakima, and one day they heard that the truant officer was asking about Gracia.

"So I gave in," she admitted. "I was just eight

at the time. My mother must have helped me with my reading at home because I was put in the third grade and had no trouble catching up." Gracia eventually attended the University of Washington in Seattle.

When Gracia was nine, her mother died, and her father sent her to live with her grandmother in Washougal. Her grandmother was Elizabeth Durgan, a widow, who married a widower named David L. Russell, a Washougal dairy farmer. Her grandfather later became the first master in the new Washington State Grange.

Gracia recalled that her father frequently told her not to forget her Indian ancestry and always to be proud of it. But her grandmother had other ideas. She told Gracia she was starting a new life and should forget her Indian background forever.

But Gracia did not forget. One day she mortified her grandmother speechless when she walked into the front room full of visiting ladies and proclaimed in a loud voice: "I am an Indian."

Grandmother Betsy lived until 1911. She was probably over 90 years old. Gracia remembers her as a gentle and kind person, but with the quiet dignity of an Indian princess. She said her grandmother was skilled as a midwife and was in great demand among the early pioneer women to deliver their babies. When she died

she had five children still living, 18 grandchildren and 28 great-grandchildren.

Most of the Ough children and their spouses and many of the grandchildren are buried in the Washougal cemetery. Grace married into the pioneer Latourell family in Oregon. Richard's son, John, now deceased, was a Camas paper mill employee most of his life. Other branches of the family are in Portland, on the Oregon coast and in Yakima.

Gracia and Reggie spent 20 years on the Yakima Indian reservation operating a cattle ranch on Gracia's allotment. Gracia worked nine of those years in the agency office in Toppenish.

In 1968, they sold the ranch and returned to Washougal, purchasing the McAllister house across the street from the Orchard Hills clubhouse. Here they enjoy retirement, their many friends and travel, and a respectable collection of Indian artifacts, including a beaded bag made by Grandmother Betsy Ough. Their hand-carved bedroom set of solid walnut was obviously purchased by Grandfather Richard on one of his last trips to London. Grandmother Betsy gave birth to most of her children in this bed. It symbolizes Richard Ough's great love and respect for his beautiful Indian bride whom he could always see in the clouds, in the forest and in his dreams. —M.B.